

HOUSE BILL REPORT

HB 2904

As Reported by House Committee On:
Education

Title: An act relating to powers and duties of the office of the education ombudsman.

Brief Description: Concerning the powers and duties of the office of the education ombudsman.

Sponsors: Representatives Kagi, Santos and Kenney.

Brief History:

Committee Activity:

Education: 1/26/10, 2/2/10 [DP].

Brief Summary of Bill

- Authorizes the Office of the Education Ombudsman to seek and accept public and private funds and spend them, along with any associated income, according to their terms and without appropriation.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION

Majority Report: Do pass. Signed by 13 members: Representatives Quall, Chair; Maxwell, Vice Chair; Priest, Ranking Minority Member; Hope, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Dammeier, Fagan, Hunt, Johnson, Lias, Orwall, Probst, Santos and Sullivan.

Staff: Barbara McLain (786-7383).

Background:

The Office of the Education Ombudsman (OEO) was established in 2006 within the Office of the Governor. The OEO is responsible for providing information to parents, students, and others regarding their rights and responsibilities within the public school system and advocating on behalf of K-12 students.

The OEO's authorizing statutes provide various powers and duties, including:

- developing parent involvement materials;

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- providing information to students, parents, and the public about the public school system;
- identifying obstacles to greater parental involvement in schools;
- recommending strategies for improving the success rates of groups of students with disproportionate academic achievement; and
- facilitating the resolution of complaints made by parents and students regarding the public school system.

The OEO's operating budget for the 2009-11 biennium is \$1.25 million, with an allocation of 7.5 full-time equivalent staff. The OEO is not currently authorized to seek, accept, or expend private or other public funds.

Summary of Bill:

The Office of the Education Ombudsman (OEO) is authorized to actively seek and accept public and private money and develop private-public partnerships to support the purposes of the office. Any gifts, grants, or endowments from public or private sources that are made for the use or benefit of the OEO may be spent without appropriation according to their terms, along with any income from such gifts, grants, or endowments.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Not requested.

Effective Date: The bill takes effect 90 days after adjournment of the session in which the bill is passed.

Staff Summary of Public Testimony:

(In support) The OEO was established in 2006, and since that time it has provided invaluable service to parents by facilitating discussions with school district officials. There have been situations where the school did not contact the parents and took no action. In these cases parents feel that they have nowhere to go. Intervention from the OEO has provided an immediate response and action so that students can safely return to school. They are invaluable foot soldiers. This would provide them an opportunity to seek additional funds so they could take more phone calls, publish more brochures and information for parents, and travel outside the Seattle area. In tight budget times, parent liaisons and parent communication are cut from school district budgets. The OEO is needed to help bridge that gap.

(In support with concerns) One of the purposes of the OEO is to provide independent facilitation. One of the challenges of accepting funds from private sources is that it could give the appearance of a lack of independence.

(Opposed) None.

Persons Testifying: (In Support) Representative Kagi, prime sponsor; Peggy Johnson; Iris Okimoto Nielsen; Sharon Rodgers; and Christie Perkins, Washington State Special Education Coalition.

(In Support with Concerns) Kim Howard, Washington State Parent Teacher Association; and Jerry Bender, Association of Washington School Principals.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying: None.